

DESIDERIO

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

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BY

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TO
E. G.

NOTE.

The subject of this play was suggested to me partly by the story of Kaspar Hausar. It was first published in 1906, and was the subject of some illuminating criticism, notably in the *Times Literary Supplement* and in the *Morning Post* in an article signed, G.K.C.

I have now revised the play, and in revising it, I have attempted firstly to make the play more suitable for the stage, and secondly to meet certain objections which were pointed out to me by the critics, and which seemed to me just and well-founded.

M. B.

PERSONS OF THE PLAY.

NELIDES, *a Senator, the King's chief adviser.*

DEMOPHILUS }
CAMILLO } . . . *Senators of Sicilia.*

DESIDERIO.

ORESTE . . . *an Inn Keeper.*

CESARIO . . . *A Merchant.*

THAIS.

VIOLETTA.

CAMILLA.

SENATORS, SOLDIERS, CROWD.

Three weeks elapse between Act I and Act II. The action takes place in the kingdom of Sicilia in the days of King Leontes. (Dresses : Classical and Renaissance.)

DESIDERIO.

ACT I. SCENE. A TAVERN.

Window C. Doors R. and L., L. leading into another room, and R. into the street. L. a large table in a recess, with chairs round it.

THAIS is discovered sitting at a table in front of a smouldering fire, R. She holds a lute on her knees. The noise of wind and rain is heard outside. ORESTE, the host, is clearing things in the corner.

THAIS is a woman about thirty ; she is beautiful, and richly dressed.

THAIS.

Rain, wind and storm ; darkness without, within,—
Oreste, bring more logs and pile the fire.

(ORESTE comes forward.)

ORESTE.

What is your pleasure ?

THAIS.

Why this solitude ?

No guests, no talk, no wine.

ORESTE.

Hark to the rain !

It is no night for guests. There will be none
Save the masked three you know.

THAIS.

Nay, from the storm

Men seek the shelter and the cheerful warmth
Of taverns. There are other things than storms
That keep men back. I think that in men's hearts
There is but little laughter left to-day ;
No wish for revel.

ORESTE.

Why ?

THAIS.

The country groans.

Why should the people sing ?

ORESTE.

The people ?

What know you of the people ?

THAIS.

You and I,

We are the people.

ORESTE.

You ! Oh ! merry jest.

You part of us ! No, soft silk-nested bird,
Whose gilded plumage decks the feast of Kings !

THAIS.

Yes, gilded is the plumage : gold the cage ;
The bird is painted, but its hidden heart
Longs for its native freedom.

ORESTE.

Do not mock me !
You live ; you batten on the rich, your prey.

THAIS.

And you, do you thrive on the poor ?

ORESTE.

I am the poor.

THAIS.

Nay, when the people rise and cast away
The chains of tyranny I shall be with them ;
You they'll reject.

ORESTE.

Come tyranny or freedom,
The people still shall thirst, and I shall draw.
For such as you, the favourites of princes,
There will be no more need.

THAIS.

There will be need
Of hearts to love—

ORESTE.

Not for love such as yours.

THAIS.

Cease taunting. Ah ! I fear your speech's import
Is deeper than you deem ; come liberty,
Man still will drink and love, and toil and fight,
And groan beneath the bitter boon of life.

ORESTE.

Forgive me, I was jesting ; there is need
For beauty such as yours till time shall end.
Here's to your health, fair Thais.

(THAIS nods.)

ORESTE.

Put away

Your doleful thoughts.

THAIS.

Alas ! they will not go.

(A knock is heard.)

ORESTE.

They come.

(He goes to the open door R.)

(Enter CESARIO, a merchant, a man of about
forty-five years old, dressed soberly. He
has a gloomy and sullen expression.)

(THAIS starts. ORESTE goes out L.)

THAIS.

(To CESARIO.) Begone at once.

CESARIO.

Why must I go ?

THAIS.

Nelides and the rest come here to-night.

CESARIO.

What care I ?

THAIS.

It is perilous. They think
That I am with them heart and soul ; they plot
The overthrow of the King.

CESARIO.

At one with us ?

THAIS.

You see the plan ?

CESARIO.

To seize the power themselves ?

THAIS.

And make the tyranny a living thing,
With brains behind it ; terrible indeed—
Far worse than what is now.

CESARIO.

(To himself.)

I see, I see.

(To THAIS.)

But they shall fail. Already in the city
The people are prepared ; within three days
The rising will be ready. Try to gain
Some knowledge of their plans.

THAIS.

Ah ! rest assured

My task is simple. Get you gone, Cesario :
They must not find you here alone with me.

CESARIO.

This is a public tavern.

THAIS.

Get you gone.

CESARIO.

When shall we meet ?

THAIS.

To-night, at the red tavern,
After the plottings.

CESARIO.

(Drawing near to her.) Why not come to me ?

THAIS.

No, not to-night.

CESARIO.

Why ?

THAIS.

No. Now get you gone.

CESARIO.

Thais, a gentle word.

THAIS.

Oh ! leave me, leave me.

This is no time for love.

CESARIO.

And yet I love you
Even as I love the cause. You and the cause
Are one.

THAIS.

Torment me not. But go.

(A knock is heard.)

They come.

*(CESARIO goes out R. Enter ORESTE L.
He goes to the door and opens it.)*

(Enter NELIDES by the same door, masked. He takes off his mask. NELIDES is a man of fifty, with grey hair and intelligent features; his expression shows firmness and cunning.)

NELIDES.

Oreste ! fire and wine ; pile on more logs !
Who was that man ?

ORESTE.

A merchant.

NELIDES.

(*Seeing THAIS.*) Lovely Thais !
Alone to-night ? Is not Camillo here ?

THAIS.

Demophilus and Camillo come anon.

(ORESTE brings wine and goes out L.)

(NELIDES warms himself at the fire.)

What news?

NELIDES.

All as before ; and every day
We wake and say this must not, cannot last ;
And yet the coach of state goes rumbling on
Along the old worn ruts—

THAIS.

Ah, you can change
The driver, but you cannot change the ruts.

NELIDES.

We'll see.

THAIS.

I care not for the lumbering coach,
But for the horses fainting 'neath their load.

NELIDES.

That will be mended.

(Another knock.)

To the door, Oreste.

(ORESTE enters L. and opens the door.)

(Enter CAMILLO and DEMOPHILUS. CAMILLO is a young man twenty-five years old, with a thoughtful delicate face. DEMOPHILUS is between thirty-five and forty. His face is heavy, and his manner abrupt.)

NELIDES.

Now bar the door, there'll be no guests to-night.

(DEMOPHILUS and CAMILLO throw off their masks and cloaks, and walk to the fire.)

CAMILLO.

A plague upon the storm. Oreste, wine.

You waited long? *(to NELIDES.)*

NELIDES.

No. Warm yourself.

ORESTE.

(Bringing wine.) Here's wine.

(THAIS sits staring into the fire and takes no notice of the new comers.)

DEMOPHILUS.

(Seeing THAIS.) Ah! Thais, why no word?

(THAIS does not answer.)

CAMILLO.

(Gently, walking up to her.) What ails you, friend ?

THAIS.

Nothing. I was but dreaming.

DEMOPHILUS.

Thais, a song.

THAIS.

I am not in the mood.

CAMILLO.

A song.

NELIDES.

A song.

THAIS.

My lute is jangled.

DEMOPHILUS.

A stave, and then to work.

THAIS.

Give me some wine.

*(They bring her a glass.)*A health to your success. *(She laughs ironically.)*

NELIDES.

(To CAMILLO.)

She mocks us.

CAMILLO.

Sing.

(THAIS takes her lute, and still turning her back and looking towards the fire, sings in a low voice.)

THAIS.

The sky is stormy and red ;
The wanderer comes from the west ;
He knocks at the door, and dread
Knocks at the heart in my breast.
Wanderer, what is thy quest ?

Worse than the battle and rout
Is the icy dwelling within ;
Empty, yet full of the shout
Of the mirthless laughter of sin.
Wanderer, stay thou without !

CAMILLO.

A melancholy song.

DEMOPHILUS.

Now something merry.

THAIS.

Oh ! plague me not. You bade me sing, I sang.
Now let me hold my peace.

NELIDES.

Leave her, and come.

(They go and sit down at the table L.)

(Exit ORESTE L.)

THAIS.

Yes, go conspire.

CAMILLO.

Yes, go, my friends, conspire.
But as for me, I have but little faith
That these our wordy plots will lead to deeds.

DEMOPHILUS.

The country must have liberty.

CAMILLO.

To kill us.

DEMOPHILUS.

I jest not.

CAMILLO.

Neither I.

DEMOPHILUS.

This secrecy,

The falsehood, the intrigue, the constant plotting
Must cease. Not over hasty must we be
In granting, and yet grant we must. The people
Groan ; we must free them from the galling yoke.
They starve, and we must give them wholesome
bread,

But not unmeasured draughts of fiery wine.

CAMILLO.

Ah ! liberty you need, the light of day !
Believe me, this is folly.

NELIDES.

Hush, Camillo,

One word : the state is like a man diseased
Who, lying tortured by a cancerous wound,
Needs no philosophies of medicine men,
No learned treatment, no exotic drug :
He needs the knife. Let us not waste the hours
In idle theory ; let us to the facts ;
The country groans, the evil is the King.
Freedom, you tell us, is the remedy.

But mark me now : the King is weak, a fool,
A coward and a child ; yet such a man
Is far more perilous than a simple knave ;
His sloth is stronger than our fiery wills,
His cowardice more potent than our rage,
His obstinacy blunts our sharpest purpose ;
And the keen arrow of our bravery
Falls helpless from the down of his resistance.
He is the King ; one day the weathercock
Which is his mind, persuaded by our foes,
May point in the direction of our ruin ;
A word, and we, the strong supports of steel,
Shall by a wisp of straw be overthrown.
Further, you say the country is misgoverned,
But you well know there is no government.
The only cure, you think, the people's rule.
What is the people's rule ? To kill the driver,
To place the horse upon the box to drive,
And wonder, when the coach is overturned.
Folly ! We need a driver whose strong hands
Can grip the reins, yet lightly handle them,
So that the steeds, unconscious of the curb,
Step willingly as though it were their will
And whim to trot along the dusty road ;
A man who knows to ply and when to refrain
From plying the sharp whip. The people's rule !
'Tis madness ; but we need the rule of few,
And these few, men.

DEMOPHILUS.

Unfold to us your plan.

NELIDES.

First to depose the King, then to create

A strong triumvirate ; we three suffice.
Camillo, what think you ?

CAMILLO.

So dark and black
The outlook, that I favour any change :
For nothing can exceed the present evil.

DEMOPHILUS.

But to the means.

NELIDES.

The King must die.

DEMOPHILUS.

The nobles ?

NELIDES.

A flock of sheep, and once the shepherd slain—

CAMILLO.

The people,—pack of wolves,—will have its way..

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DEMOPHILUS.

That is why we must gain them by reform,
Wise measures and new laws.

NELIDES.

The people need

A ruler, not to rule themselves, and now
There is no ruler ; our measures shall be wise,
We must discern, anticipate their needs
Before they are aware of them. The King
Will never listen to our wise advice,
Therefore the King must go.

DEMOPHILUS.

Who'll do the deed ?

Not we ?

NELIDES.

As to the means, they shall be found.

Leave that to me, it is not worth our talk.

(THAIS *turns round and looks at* NELIDES.)

(To THAIS.) What think you, Thais ?

THAIS.

Men are blind.

NELIDES.

And then ?

THAIS.

And foolish.

NELIDES.

Well ?

THAIS.

You are a man,

A thoughtful man, 'tis true, a man of might :

Yet blinded by the foolishness of men.

NELIDES.

What mean you ?

THAIS.

See you not, if you kill the King,

Creating loyalty, you'll stir up rage ?

NELIDES.

(Ironically.) Mean you the people love the King ?

THAIS.

They'll hate

His murderers.

NELIDES.

Say deposed, not killed.

THAIS.

Then you,
Will have to act more boldly than all kings.
Believe me, you must have a king ; you need
A man who's truly weak ; for with the screen
And help of some such dummy king you act
Unquestioned, undisturbed ; find a new king.

NELIDES.

Find me the man—where shall we find this king ?
(THAIS gets up from a chair and remains a
moment silent and thoughtful.)

NELIDES.

What's in your mind ?

THAIS.

The fragment of a song.

NELIDES.

What song ?

THAIS.

A ballad. Strange ; 'tis nothing, yet—

NELIDES.

What ?

THAIS.

An old ballad called " The foolish King."

They brought him from the mountains dim,
They crowned his head with lilies wild,
They put him on a golden throne,
And piteously he wept and smiled.

" Good people all, why do ye thus ?
Let me begone and earn my bread ;
I am no king," cried he. " Our king
Is daft and mad," the people said.

NELIDES.

Is not one foolish king enough ?

THAIS.

You know not
The lore and legends of the country folk.
Among them there is one which says this land
Will never prosper till a king shall come
Called the White King.

CAMILLO.

And what is this White King ?

THAIS.

His soul shall be all white ; and in his hands
He bears a talisman, a shining box
Filled with most precious balm.

NELIDES.

What balm ?

THAIS.

Its name
Is pity.

NELIDES.

Thais, I think you are bewitched to-night.

THAIS.

Yet you must find a king.

NELIDES.

If we must wait
Until he drops from star-land, we wait long.

THAIS.

And the king's cousin, Lysias, the child,
Who vanished ?

NELIDES.

He is dead. He'll come no more—
(*hesitating*) Unless, unless—for life is strange (*to*
himself) unless—

(*A loud knocking is heard at the door.*)

THAIS.

Here is your king. (*The knocking is repeated.*)

NELIDES.

A guest. Oreste, hither.

Enter ORESTE, L.

ORESTE.

I'm here, sirs.

NELIDES.

See who's knocking at the door.

(*ORESTE goes to the door, R. and*
looks through a peep-hole.)

ORESTE.

A tramp, a beggar. (*He shouts through the door.*)

Begone !

THAIS.

On such a night !

No, let him in.

(*ORESTE looks enquiringly at NELIDES.*)

NELIDES.

Yes, let the wanderer in.

(ORESTE goes to open the door. THAIS starts and hums to herself the tune of her first song.

The door is open, a wild gust of wind and rain is heard, and DESIDERIO enters. He is young, about thirty. He is clothed in tattered clothes and has a large torn cloak ; his hair is dishevelled, his look wild ; but his demeanour is dignified and his face distinguished and beautiful. He looks round the room bewildered. He is drenched with the rain and his teeth chatter.

They are all at first astonished and impressed by his appearance, for although he seems to be obviously a beggar, he has not the demeanour of one.)

NELIDES.

Who are you ? Whence come you ?

(ORESTE goes out L. DESIDERIO does not answer, but remains standing by the door shivering, and staring in front of him with a bewildered gaze.)

THAIS.

Let him be ;

He is but a poor wanderer, daft and crazy.

(To DESIDERIO gently.) Come to the fireside.

(To DEMOPHILUS and NELIDES.) I will mind him—Sirs,

Proceed with your dark plot.

DEMOPHILUS.

(Laughing.)

A goodly king.

NELIDES.

Yet do you mark ?

CAMILLO.

A likeness ?

NELIDES.

Yes.

DEMOPHILUS.

To whom ?

NELIDES.

The reigning prince.

DEMOPHILUS.

Coincidence.

NELIDES.

(Musing.)'Tis strange. *(Pause.)*

We must to work. 'Tis late. Come, Sirs, to work.

*(They seat themselves at the table L. and**resume their discussion in an undertone.**They soon become absorbed in their argument. DESIDERIO crouches by the fire, shivering and warming himself. THAIS brings him a glass of wine.)*

THAIS.

Drink this. *(DESIDERIO takes the glass and empties it.)*

Poor child, whence came you ?

DESIDERIO.

From the dark.

THAIS.

But whence ? What is your native land ?

DESIDERIO.

The dark.

THAIS.

What is your name ?

DESIDERIO.

They called me Desiderio.

THAIS.

They ? Who ?

DESIDERIO.

The men who taught me all I know.

THAIS.

What are you ?

DESIDERIO.

" I am the child who's born to be king.

I come from the dark, to the dark I go.

On the topmost tree I shall dangle and swing,

And out of my bones shall the white rose grow."

That is the rhyme they taught me as a child ;

They found it pinned upon my clothes the night

That I was left outside the cottage door.

THAIS.

Who are you then ?

DESIDERIO.

An outcast and a king.

I cannot recollect my infancy.

I think I had a mother once who loved me.

THAIS.

What was the cottage ?

DESIDERIO.

There I lived and grew.
A peasant cared for me.

THAIS.

You live there still.

DESIDERIO.

Not now. I used to help to till the fields.
To plough, until the day the noble came.

THAIS.

What noble ?

DESIDERIO.

Once a noble sought for shelter ;
He came on horseback ; he had lost his way.
He noticed me, and asked me what I knew ;
But I knew nothing save that jingling rhyme.
My foster-father bade me rise betimes ;
At dawn he said farewell. I was to go,
To follow the strange noble. How I wept !

THAIS.

And whither went you ?

DESIDERIO.

That I never knew.
They took me to a palace far away.

THAIS.

Who was the noble ?

DESIDERIO.

To this very day
I know not. There they taught me songs and
names.

And how to read the bright illumined scroll,
The words of poets and the deeds of kings ;
And how to read the language of the stars.

THAIS.

But who were they ?

DESIDERIO.

They never taught me that.

THAIS.

Could you not guess the secret for yourself ?

DESIDERIO.

I was alone, save when they came to teach me.
Alone ; my sole companions knew not this.

THAIS.

And who were they ?

DESIDERIO.

The flowers, the silent grass,
The garden lilies, and the golden fish.
Which swam where the tall fountains played and
plashed.
I was a prisoner.

THAIS.

They imprisoned you ?

DESIDERIO.

Not then. My prison was the world, my bars
The loneliness in which the soul is cramped.

I pined for liberty ; but now I know
That we are all in prison. This I knew
The day they shut me in the palace dungeon.
It was the day a throng of nobles came,
Splendid and bright with banners and with plumes.

THAIS.

Why did they this ?

DESIDERIO.

I know not ; I was grateful ;
For thus the secret was revealed to me.

THAIS.

What secret ?

DESIDERIO.

That all men are doomed to prison ;
To everlasting solitude and sorrow.
But when the soul rebels no more, we see
The dark bars disappear ; the soul perceives
The face of God, and drinks eternal light.

THAIS.

And were you long in prison ?

DESIDERIO.

Days or months
Or years, I know not. For the time passed swiftly.

THAIS.

You were alone ?

DESIDERIO.

They gave me books ; and I
Had bright companions, shining ministers
Who talked with me and sang and made sweet
music.

THAIS.

And who were these ?

DESIDERIO.

My thoughts, my dreams, my prayers ;
The thoughts of others, of the mighty dead,
And all the spirits of the shadowy world.

THAIS.

When were you freed ?

DESIDERIO.

One night, quite suddenly,
They came ; they opened wide my dungeon door.
They pushed me out into the night ; they said :
“ Ask for a horse, a sword, and for a crown.
Thou shalt be king.”

THAIS.

Where went you then ?

DESIDERIO.

I wandered
Over the hills and through the grassy fields.

THAIS.

Alone ?

DESIDERIO.

The wayside flowers, the running stream
Were with me ; all the happy sights and sounds
Of the free country whence for many years
I had been banished in the noble's home.

THAIS.

But men ?

DESIDERIO.

I sought for shelter and for work
In villages ; but I was strange, they mocked me.
They drove me from their doors with sticks and
stones.

THAIS.

You never spoke with people ?

DESIDERIO.

Frequently.

I spoke and begged, and played the lute and sang.
They threw me bread ; sometimes they gave me
money.

THAIS.

Found you no friends ?

DESIDERIO.

The children were my friends ;
They came to tease me. In the end they'd stay
To listen to my words.

THAIS.

But among men

Found you no friends ?

DESIDERIO.

Poor outcasts such as you.

THAIS.

How know you I'm an outcast ?

DESIDERIO.

I can read

The sadness in your eyes, and I have come
To comfort you ; for you were sad to-night,
And I can feel the sorrow of the sad.

THAIS.

Whom seek you now ?

DESIDERIO.

I sought you, I have found.

I understand your heart, for when I speak
My words go straight into your soul like songs
Into the minstrel's mind. There is no bar,
No film, no veil between your soul and mine.

THAIS.

Alas ! it is all true. I needed hope.
But you, why came you to this evil city ?

DESIDERIO.

I have lived long amongst the groaning poor ;
And now I come to comfort the sad rich :
The mighty and the gay, the worldly wise
Who ache with hungry craving to find love
And peace which shun them. I will seek the care-
worn ;

And understand their sorrows and their cares.

I will seek all the sad and strive to know

* Their sorrows, and to feel with them. The gay,
The foolish and the wise, the strong, the weak,
The schemer and the conqueror and the prince,
The wanton and the Queen. In all of these,
Although they wear a mask of smiling gold
Or frowning iron, there is some sore spot
Which needs the balm of pity. And that balm
I bring ; for there is no man made of God
Whose soul, though overgrown with weeds, though
foul

With slime, but hides some secret pearl, some
flower

Amidst the refuse. I can find the pearl
In the dark slime. I can detect the flower
Among the weeds, and water it with tears.
I am no judge, to shield me with a mask
From God ; to shirk the sin and brand the sinner.
I am no poet in a world of dream,
Who, fearful of reality, denies
The ugliness, and turns his eyes from sin.
I am a human man, and through my weakness
I understand and love the hearts of men.
I have been deep in hell and know the dark.
Therefore I came into this busy world—
This world of palaces and powers and plots—
For only through the souls of those who rule
Can those who serve be bettered. I have come
To save the people ; to attain this end
I first must reach the spirit of the rulers.

THAIS.

God help you. God have mercy on us all !

NELIDES.

(Rising from his seat, not noticing THAIS.)

Thais ! A song !

CAMILLO.

Our work is done. To play.

*(THAIS rises, and, walking across the room
goes up to NELIDES and takes him aside.)*

THAIS.

I've found the man.

NELIDES.

Whom ?

THAIS.

Him whom we all seek.

NELIDES.

The king ?

THAIS.

The king.

NELIDES.

Who ?

THAIS.

(*Pointing to DESIDERIO.*) This wild, tattered man.

NELIDES.

(*Laughing.*) My thanks.

THAIS.

I am in earnest. Talk with him.

He is the man. Look not upon his rags.

Look in his face. He looks a king ; his speech

Is like his face. A perfect figure-head,

Who'll never cause you trouble. A pure fool.

NELIDES.

Maybe. I'll speak with him.

(*Walking up to DESIDERIO.*)

A word with you.

Whence came you hither ; and what is your name ?

DESIDERIO.

" I am the child who's born to be king.

I come from the dark, to the dark I go.

On the topmost tree I shall dangle and swing,
And out of my bones shall the white rose
grow."

NELIDES.

What does this mean ?

DESIDERIO.

I am a foundling, Sir—
That is the rhyme they found upon my clothes.

NELIDES.

What is your native land ?

DESIDERIO.

I know not, Sir.

NELIDES.

Your name ?

DESIDERIO.

They called me Desiderio ;
But in the villages I have no name.
One day an aged prince, to whom I sang,
Asked me my name, and when I told it him
He said : " No longer now is that your name ;
Instead of this, henceforth you shall be called
The comforter of all the sorrowful."

NELIDES.

Your home ?

DESIDERIO.

I am a homeless wanderer.
And on the high road by my work or song
I earn or beg my bread.

NELIDES.

Know you your letters ?

DESIDERIO.

My letters ? I can read the printed page,
And the illumined scroll and Homer's song,
And Virgil's lore, and I can twang the lute ;
And once I used to wield the sword and rapier.
I ride and dance and sing ; astrology
Is known to me—the horoscopes of men,
The properties of herbs. Yes, I am wise.

NELIDES.

Where did you learn these things ?

DESIDERIO.

A noble taught me.

I was for years a page.

NELIDES.

And who was he ?

DESIDERIO.

I know not.

NELIDES.

But where dwelt he ?

DESIDERIO.

Far away

Beyond the mountains. It is many years
Since I was there.

NELIDES.

And where were you before ?

DESIDERIO.

I lived, a foundling, in a peasant's hut.

NELIDES.

Why did you leave the noble ?

DESIDERIO.

They expelled me.

But I was glad, how glad, to go !

NELIDES.

(To THAIS.)

'Tis well.

A crazy mountebank—

THAIS.

But note his face.

His face is not a peasant's face ; his speech
Is gentle, though his mind is simple ; note
His likeness to the reigning prince. For years
He lived with nobles. Take him ; let him pass
As the lost prince—the murdered Lysias
All helps : his simple mind, he was imprisoned
There in his palace. Put fair clothes upon him,
And he will look as princely as the King.
If he be crazy, easier is the task.

NELIDES.

An idiot with a goodly presence, meek
And docile. That is true ; 'tis what we need.
I'll take him to the palace ; we shall see
How he appears divested of his rags.
(To DESIDERIO.) Come, Desiderio, you must follow
me.

DESIDERIO.

But whither ?

NELIDES.

To the palace.

(CAMILLO *and* DEMOPHILUS *start*.)

DEMOPHILUS.

What is this ?

NELIDES.

Sirs, set your minds at rest. I will explain.

(*To DESIDERIO.*) You, follow me.

(*To DEMOPHILUS and CAMILLO.*) Come, Sirs, 'tis time to go.

(*Exeunt NELIDES, DEMOPHILUS, and CAMILLO. DESIDERIO follows them quite naturally, as though it were a matter of course.*)

THAIS.

“An idiot with a goodly presence, meek.”

(*She laughs.*)

O, wise Nelides, it is you the fool—

And, he, poor child—alas ! alas ! poor child !

(*She sits by the fire, which is burning low, and, taking her lute, hums her song.*)

The sky is stormy and red ;

The wanderer comes from the west ;

He knocks at the door, and dread

Knocks at the heart in my breast.

Wanderer, what is thy quest ?

Worse than the battle and rout

Is the icy dwelling within :

Empty, yet full of the shout

Of the mirthless laughter of sin.

Wanderer, stay thou without !

ACT II.

(A room in the Palace used by the KING for audiences. Two doors on the left, one leading to a passage and one to the KING'S private room. A large window, c., overlooking the square. DEMOPHILUS is discovered pacing up and down the room. He is evidently in a mood of irritability. Enter VIOLETTA, a handsome woman between thirty and thirty-five year old.)

VIOLETTA.

A word with you.

DEMOPHILUS.

The Council is to meet ;
I have no time for speech,

VIOLETTA.

The king presides ?

DEMOPHILUS.

The king in person.

VIOLETTA.

And how fares the king ?

DEMOPHILUS.

He looks the part ; and yet the farce is foolish.
What is the need of such a dummy king ?
There is no progress.

VIOLETTA.

There must be a king.

DEMOPHILUS.

A king ; but this—you know he is half crazy.

VIOLETTA.

I find him far from foolish ; sensible,
In apprehension swift, and fair of speech.

DEMOPHILUS.

An actor ;—and I say he plays the part ;
Too well he plays, for he thinks himself a king.

VIOLETTA.

He is a king.

DEMOPHILUS.

So long as he obeys.

VIOLETTA.

And should he disobey ?

DEMOPHILUS.

Then we shall see.

This morning, at the Council, we shall see.
I mean him once for all to understand.
Or else he goes.

VIOLETTA.

What ! kill the king once more ?

DEMOPHILUS.

You take his part ?

VIOLETTA.

I find no fault with him.

DEMOPHILUS.

He is but a play actor.

VIOLETTA.

Yet the king,
Since you have made him so.

DEMOPHILUS.

We shall be plain
To-day ; from henceforth he shall know his duties ;
And they are summed up in a word : Obey.

VIOLETTA.

But he will disobey.

DEMOPHILUS.

Why anger me ?
This mummer is not worth a moment's quarrel
To you and me.

VIOLETTA.

He pleases me, but why
I know not.

DEMOPHILUS.

Let us talk of other things.
Let not these little matters come between us.

VIOLETTA.

They are not little, they are near to me ;
And near to me the country's fate ; the king
Is near to me : especially this king.

DEMOPHILUS.

I say there is no king ; we are the king.

VIOLETTA.

No, no ; you are his humble senators.

DEMOPHILUS.

Violetta, cease, I pray ; do not provoke me.
Why speak you thus ? Why are you different ?
Why do you let these trifles come between us ?
Why do you thus ill-treat me ?

VIOLETTA.

I ill-treat you ?
Alas ! poor victim ! what I said was this :
That once the king is crowned, the king is king,
Be he an upstart or a prince's son.
You sowed the seed, and now you reap the harvest.
Moreover, Desiderio pleases me ;
Nor is he mad and foolish, as you say ;
You do not understand him.

DEMOPHILUS.

Understand him !
This upstart, this impostor ; understand him !
You too are crazy now ; but hush ! they come !

(Exit VIOLETTA, R.)

(Enter DESIDERIO, L., richly dressed. He wears a sword. Enter with him NELIDES and CAMILLO and four senators. DESIDERIO takes his place at the head of the table, L., and beckons to the others to sit down.)

DESIDERIO.

I wait your pleasure.

FIRST SENATOR.

These are the matters, Sire,
We bring unto your Majesty's attention :
The soldiers' pay ; a fresh tax we propose ;
A mission talked of from the Court of Mantua,
Regarding the betrothal of your Majesty ;
And in addition, one more trifling matter
Remains.

DESIDERIO.

Let us to work.

FIRST SENATOR

As to this tax.

DESIDERIO.

There shall be no fresh taxes.

FIRST SENATOR.

The festival
To celebrate the envoys sent from Mantua
Is costly.

DESIDERIO.

There need be no festival.

FIRST SENATOR.

The envoys must be welcomed with due state.

NELIDES.

We cannot slight the Duke.

DESIDERIO.

There is no need
Of any festival.

NELIDES.

Your Majesty—

DESIDERIO.

I will have no fresh taxes.

FIRST SENATOR.

Secondly,

The matter of the mercenaries' pay.

The sum—

DESIDERIO.

There is no need of any sum ;

Disband them. Do we meditate a war

On foreign countries ? To defend ourselves

We are sufficient in ourselves.

FIRST SENATOR.

My liege—

DESIDERIO.

I said disband them.

FIRST SENATOR.

Then the Mantuan mission—

DESIDERIO.

I will not wed a foreigner ; my wife

Shall be elected from my people.

NELIDES.

Sire,

Negotiations are on foot ; the Duke—

DESIDERIO.

Shall be informed according to my will.

We need no Mantuan mission and no feast,

Therefore there is no need of any tax.

NELIDES.

(*Aside to DEMOPHILUS.*) We will discuss this later.

FIRST SENATOR.

Still one thing
Remains—the merest trifle. Will your Majesty
Be pleased to sign this warrant ?

(He shows a parchment.)

DESIDERIO.

I must know
Its purport.

FIRST SENATOR.

It is naught that signifies—
The punishment of treason.

DESIDERIO.

Pray explain.

FIRST SENATOR.

The day your Majesty was crowned, some men,
Some women—rabble I should call them—dared
To greet your Majesty with traitorous cries,
And strove to stir the people to sedition ;
But they were placed in safety, and condemned
For treason.

DESIDERIO.

And the punishment ?

FIRST SENATOR.

Is death.

DESIDERIO.

You ask me quietly to sign away
The lives of innocent men and guiltless women,
Because they dared to speak their minds, to say
That kings are needless—nothing but the truth !

FIRST SENATOR.

The act was treasonable, the penalty
Is death. My liege, this is the country's law.

DESIDERIO.

And I am the country's king. Methinks the crime
Concerned but me alone. Well, I forgive them.

FIRST SENATOR.

Your Majesty's forgiveness must not hinder
The action of the law.

DESIDERIO.

I pardon them.

DEMOPHILUS.

Such action would be rash and ill-advised.
Your Majesty must let yourself be guided
By counsellors grown grey in state affairs.
Such action would encourage other rebels,
Endangering the throne's security.
I beg your Majesty to be advised—
To sign the warrant.

DESIDERIO.

I will pardon them.

✓ It seems the sovereign has the right of pardon.

FIRST SENATOR.

Doubtless the right exists ; but in this case—

NELIDES.

It is not possible ; they must be punished.
The safety of the throne must be assured ;
Example must be made ; the punishment
Is mild—there is no torture, only death.

DESIDERIO.

(Takes the warrant and tears it to pieces.)

I pray you let the prisoners be released.

NELIDES.

My Liege—

FIRST SENATOR.

But common prudence—

DESIDERIO.

I have spoken.

(Rising.) My Lords, I have no further need to-day
Of you, my trusted servants ; I have spoken.

I wish you, honourable Sirs, good day.

See that the prisoners be released at once.

(The SENATORS rise in bewildered astonishment and bow. They go out L., all except NELIDES, who remains.)

NELIDES.

This comedy must not last.

DESIDERIO.

What comedy ?

NELIDES.

This farce, this childish playing at being king.
Remember who you are and whence you came,
All ragged from the streets.

DESIDERIO.

You made me king.

If I am king, then I shall act as king ;

My sovereign will shall be the people's will.

NELIDES.

Your will shall be your counsellors' will : our will.

DESIDERIO.

Either I will be king, or I will go
Back to the people, back to whence I came.
I will have all or nothing. So depose me,
Or let me have my way.

NELIDES.

This is mere folly ;
We hold you in the hollow of our hand ;
One word, and we unmask you.

DESIDERIO.

To the people ?
I ask for nothing better ; let me go.
The people are my friends, they understand me ;
Tell them your stratagem : how you enticed me
To play a dummy's part, to shield your plot.
Tell them of the imposture. Let me go.

NELIDES.

The people ! Ah ! you think the people love you ?
This is the rabble and the people's dregs.
Think you the people need a tramp for king ?

DESIDERIO.

The people understand me when I speak ;
And they shall love me. Let me go to them ;
You have no need of monarchs such as I.
I am an outcast, let me seek the street,
The highway and the ditch. And all shall know
The trick you played

NELIDES.

Now, listen to my words :
What's done is done ; you are anointed king,
And king you must remain. We are no tyrants,
We wish to ensure the welfare of the people ;
Yet not by idle phrase nor empty wish,
But by just measures and wise policy.
Be guided ; you know naught of state affairs.
You wish the people's welfare ; so do we.
How can you serve it best ? By staying here,
By being king ; but you must bend to reason ;
And if you wish to be the people's champion,
You must ensure your throne ; act prudently
And wisely ; listen to your counsellors,
Whose purpose is lofty as your own.

DESIDERIO.

You mean that I must murder innocent men.

NELIDES.

Rebellion must be crushed.

DESIDERIO.

There are no rebels.
A few excited voices in a crowd.

NELIDES.

Those voices, if they be not straightway silenced,
Will grow into the roar of multitudes
Who'll drive us to our ruin. The result
Is anarchy and riot and civil war ;
And in the end some tyrant will arise,
Be he a noble or a demagogue,
To restore order. Do you wish for this ?

DESIDERIO.

The gift of pardon is the privilege
Of kings ; and I refuse to be deprived
Of what has ever been the sovereign's right
In all times, in all countries.

NELIDES.

Put aside

This question ; for this once these men may go ;
But should rebellion raise its head once more,
It must be crushed. If you would be a king
You must accept the task of monarchy.
Duty must override your inclinations ;
It is a monarch's duty to be firm
And to ensure the law, the maintenance
Of order. Without this no king on earth,
Be he the first of saints, can benefit
His people. So I say to you : be guided,
And remain king.

DESIDERIO.

I understand my duties
Far otherwise than you. So let me go.

NELIDES.

The people, when they learn of your imposture,
Will make no nice distinction as to guilt
Or innocence. They will be pitiless,
And slay you.

DESIDERIO.

I would rather far be slain
By them than slay my soul by heeding you.

NELIDES.

You seek the people's welfare. Listen to me :
It is imperative a king should rule.

DESIDERIO.

Why so ?

NELIDES.

Because the people need a ruler,
Being unfit to rule themselves. Believe me,
By going you cast away the Heaven-sent chance
Of benefiting those you love ; you shrink,
You dare not face the task. You run away.
Ponder my words, for they are just and true.
Ponder my words, before you answer me.
We killed the king because he was a tyrant.
Now that we have a just, well-meaning king,
He will abandon us. It is not right,
But contrary unto your chosen cause.
Remain ; be guided. Ponder on my words.

DESIDERIO.

(After a moment's pause.)

I'll ponder on your words. But if I stay
It will be as a king ; to exercise
My will, my influence, my authority.
Nor shall I need your guidance and your craft ;
The people's voice, the people's heart shall help
me :

The voice of heaven speaking in their voice.
Yes, if I stay, I shall be a king indeed,
And rule not through you, but in your despite.
I go to ponder on these things. Farewell.

(Exit DESIDERIO into his room.)

NELIDES.

Fool that I was. Oh ! folly, triple folly !
(*Enter VIOLETTA R.*)

VIOLETTA.

Good morrow, my Lord Nelides ; is the Council—

NELIDES.

Yes, ended.

VIOLETTA.

And how fares King Lysias ?

NELIDES.

He acts with dignity. He plays his part.

VIOLETTA.

He has strange dignity. I do not think
He can be basely born.

NELIDES.

Yet he is foolish.

VIOLETTA.

I have not found him so.

NELIDES.

A crazy mind.

VIOLETTA.

Far from it.

NELIDES.

Haply he reveals to you
The qualities he hides from us. But you—
You understand the hearts of men.

VIOLETTA.

His gifts
Are rare ; for he is versed in books and know-
ledge.

NELIDES.

Book knowledge is not needed, but strong sense.

VIOLETTA.

You do not understand him

NELIDES.

I confess
He seems to me a child, and somewhat crazy.

VIOLETTA.

He is not mad ; a dreamer, I concede.
But reasonable, and gentle in his reason.

NELIDES.

It is not so ; if you would know the truth,
His childishness conceals a headstrong will,
And a mad purpose. He forgets his part
And seeks to play the king in very earnest.

VIOLETTA.

But surely you have skill enough to check him.

NELIDES.

Yes, him ; but he has friends.

VIOLETTA.

Where ? Who ?

NELIDES.

Among the people.

VIOLETTA.

What people ?

NELIDES.

Outcasts, tramps and courtesans.
He has a hold upon them ; and they love him.
Fool that I was to have to do with fools,
An able man were wax between my fingers.
To manage this strange fool—

VIOLETTA.

It needs a woman.

NELIDES.

There is a woman. We had scarcely crowned him
When he, in secret, sought his ancient haunts
In taverns, and commingled with the crowd ;
And we, who little in the guileless fool
Suspected guile, knew not of this ; they tell me
He sought these places frequently, and spoke ;
And now the people love him. There is one,
A courtesan named Thais ; she of old
Is known to me : a bold and cunning woman.
They say he loves her—that she holds him fast ;
She, too, is of the people. Now to-day,
Whilst at the Council prudent laws were framed,
Calmly the boy declares that he is king :
That he will make his laws. To us demurring,
He answers by dissolving the discussion.
This cannot be.

VIOLETTA.

Friend, set your soul at rest.

Leave him to me.

NELIDES.

It means our common ruin.

VIOLETTA.

My fingers are more nimble, friend, than yours ;
Leave him to me.

NELIDES.

Do what you will ; but if he loves another ?
Yet this must cease, or else—

VIOLETTA.

Or else ?

NELIDES.

(*Turning down his thumb.*)

Repeat—

VIOLETTA.

Depose him ?

NELIDES.

(*Looking at her.*) No ; depose is not the word.

VIOLETTA.

Another murder and another change !
Leave him to me and set your mind at rest.

NELIDES.

Either he must obey us utterly,
Or else he disappears ; if this continues
It means the ruin of us all. Methinks
His swift despatch will soon be needed now.
He is gone to ponder on my wise advice.
I pray you, Duchess, influence him ; I know
That you can mould him to the shape you please,
As you have moulded others in the past.
Destroy the influence of this other woman.
I trust him to you.

VIOLETTA.

I promise you to try.
He comes ; now leave me, I must talk with him.
(*Exit NELIDES R. Enter DESIDERIO L.
from his room.*)

VIOLETTA.

(*Rising.*) Good-morrow to your Majesty—

DESIDERIO.

(*Smiling, bows low to her.*) Good-morrow.

VIOLETTA.

'Tis well that you have come.
(*DESIDERIO sits down, R.*)

DESIDERIO.

Now let us talk.
(*VIOLETTA sits down also.*)

VIOLETTA.

So you dissolved the Council ?

DESIDERIO.

Since they choose
To make me king, they should not be amazed
If like a king I act.

VIOLETTA:

Listen to me ;—
You are a boy, nay more, a child, a baby ;
And you are in the midst of subtle men.
This palace is a nest of venomous snakes.
You do not understand, you cannot know
The tangled threads whereof this life is woven ;
Therefore you must be careful, well advised,

And listen to the words of such as I
Who wish you well, and know the hearts of men.

DESIDERIO.

I also know the hearts of men.

VIOLETTA.

Poor child !

DESIDERIO.

Nelides was with you.

VIOLETTA.

You met him ?

DESIDERIO.

'No ;

But he has talked with you : he told you this,
That I was dangerous, that the people loved me,
And that I sought them in my ancient haunts
And stirred them with hot words. That this must
cease,

Or else that I must be removed like him
They lately have deposed. Is it not true ?

VIOLETTA.

You listened at the door !

DESIDERIO.

You know full well

I am not base. I listened to my heart
That beats in subtle tune with yours.

VIOLETTA.

'Tis true.

He spoke such things, and he spoke true.

DESIDERIO.

Violetta,

I care not. I am stronger far than they,
And I am king.

VIOLETTA.

What seek you then to do ?

DESIDERIO.

I shall set free the men who groan in pain.
There shall be no more tyranny.

VIOLETTA.

No crimes,
No prisons and no punishments ; no slaves
To toil that we may live in ease ; but all
Shall bear their share of toil ; we shall exchange
Our gorgeous palaces for simple farms.
Oh, ancient dream ! Oh, old, old fairy tale !
Oh, Desiderio, you are young indeed !

DESIDERIO.

You do not understand ; all men are slaves,
And I have come to give them liberty. °
The rich men still shall buy, the poor shall work,
The soldier fight, the artist and the poet
Still build their dreams, the merchant still shall
traffic ;
And some shall still command and some obey ;
But I shall give to all a talisman,
So that each man in his appointed place
Shall play his part, contented with his lot.

VIOLETTA.

What is your talisman ?

DESIDERIO.

The gift of peace
That comes when the rebellious soul of man
Consents to the Eternal Will, and feels
Its fetters break and fall, its stifling cell
Broaden into a boundless sea of light.
I come to break the tyranny of dreams—
Dreams of ambition, dreams of power and wealth.
If men can only know these things are dreams,
Content, they shall inhale the quality
Of life and find it new ; content with toil,
And swift to catch the fleeting gleams of joy
That come like rippling waves ; to recognise
In the swift glimpse infinity, to taste
In minutes of brief bliss eternity.
They, in the brutal chariot-race of life,
More glad shall pass, not thinking of the toil,
But of the splendour of the race ; they'll feel
The wind of God in their hair, and in their hands
The reins ; calm in their knowledge that the course
Is wisely planned by an eternal mind.

•

VIOLETTA.

But first they must believe you, follow you,
And then they must be born again, and changed.

DESIDERIO.

Yes, changed as when men cast aside a mask,
A garment of disguise, a robe of durance ;
And walk untrammelled in the light once more.
I come to tell them what they are ; to free them
From thralldom self-imposed ; and I will strive
To help them to discover their true selves,
To throw the burden of their masks away.

VIOLETTA.

Others have tried, and met with scorn and death.

DESIDERIO.

The people understand me when I speak.

VIOLETTA.

And they shall be the first to turn upon you !
Who are the people whom you see ?

DESIDERIO.

The men,
The women of the town who toil and work,
And meet in taverns and in public places.

VIOLETTA.

Have you yet found a soul who understands ?

DESIDERIO.

Ah ! yes.

VIOLETTA.

Who is it ?

DESIDERIO.

I once met with one.*
But she is gone. She left me.

VIOLETTA.

Who is she ?

DESIDERIO.

Thais. She understood.

VIOLETTA.

But who is she ?

DESIDERIO.

A harlot.

VIOLETTA.

Is she fair ?

DESIDERIO.

Her soul is fair,
And dwells in the soft sorrow of her eyes.

VIOLETTA.

She understood ?

DESIDERIO.

My words, my thoughts, my heart.

VIOLETTA.

You loved her ?

DESIDERIO.

Yes, with all my heart and soul.

VIOLETTA.

Why did you leave her ?

DESIDERIO.

She abandoned me.
Cesario, the merchant, worships her,
And she shall presently wed him. It is well.

VIOLETTA.

But you no longer love her ?

DESIDERIO.

Mine is love
That changes not. I love her now and always.

VIOLETTA.

You love her more than me ?

DESIDERIO.

Because I loved her
I now love you ; and did I not love you
I could not love her.

VIOLETTA.

Tell me more about her.

DESIDERIO.

The moment that I saw her eyes, I knew
That she could understand my inmost soul ;
And she, too, knew it ; there was never need
Of words between us. I could hear her heart,
And read her eyes—she listened to my thoughts.

VIOLETTA.

When did you find her ?

DESIDERIO.

The first day I came.

VIOLETTA.

And she loved you ?

DESIDERIO.

She used to pity me,
As I too pity her. I pity and love.

VIOLETTA.

And do you pity me ?

DESIDERIO.

Oh ! yes, Violetta.
I love and pity you.

VIOLETTA.

But why this pity ?

DESIDERIO.

Because you are so utterly forlorn ;
Your heart is frozen. You are numb with grief,
And mute with misery.

VIOLETTA.

You say you love me.
This is not love, this saint-like pity of yours.

DESIDERIO.

Albeit less than love, 'tis more than love.
Amongst a thousand weeds, I stumble on
Along dim paths, and over pointed stones,
In the grey dusk ; but in this sunless world
I see the light that from the stifled soul
Shines through the masks of men ;
And in your face I saw the speaking flame.
And I would gladly die to set it free,
So gladly, if they came to me and said
" You for Violetta's happiness must die,"
You cannot picture what my joy would be :
More than the joy of heroes in the fight,
Of minstrels striking new celestial chords,
Of poets when the winged words beat round them
And shine in serried ranks of flashing gold ;
Of mothers smiling at a new-born child ;
Such would my joy be.

VIOLETTA.

If you love me thus,
How can you love another ? Would you die
For Thais ?

DESIDERIO.

(After a slight pause.) Thais would not need my death.

But I would live for her sake, though an angel
Should lead me gently to the darkling river,
And though I longed for silence and for peace :
I would turn back and face the world for her.

VIOLETTA.

But which of us do you love most of all ?

DESIDERIO.

There is no more or most ; no best, no least.
I love the light that shines in both of you.

VIOLETTA.

Think you your words will stir no jealousy
In me ?

DESIDERIO.

I know not what is jealousy,
For I have never felt it.

VIOLETTA.

Should there come
One like to you whom I loved more than you,
Whom Thais loved, who understood us both
Like you, but more, who in all things excelled you—

DESIDERIO.

I should be glad, if you and she were glad.

VIOLETTA.

But she, this woman, loves you ?

DESIDERIO.

No, I said

She pities me, just as you pity me.

VIOLETTA.

O, Desiderio, wherefore did you come ?
You will bring sorrow to yourself and me.

DESIDERIO.

No. I have come to take your grief away :
/ To share your lonely twilight.

VIOLETTA.

I am glad
In spite of all, glad that you came to me.

DESIDERIO.

My life is walled with darkness and with sorrow ;
But love is something bright to me. A sun
That floods the prison of my soul with light.
I am in prison, and love is the song
The prisoner hears far-off at eventide ;
Love is the dawn I feel but may not see :
The moonlight of my everlasting dream,
The space of luminous calm I cannot reach,
That stretches endlessly beyond the bars.

VIOLETTA.

This is not love ; this is a poet's dream ;
A web of fancy woven of glistening dew,
But I will brush these idle threads away.

*(Enter DEMOPHILUS, L., from the passage.
He starts at seeing VIOLETTA and DESI-
DERIO engaged in close conversation,
DESIDERIO looking into her face. DESI-
DERIO rises. DEMOPHILUS bows. DESI-
DERIO goes out L into his room. VIO-
LETTA rises.)*

• DEMOPHILUS.

As I predicted things have come about ;
This senseless plan of a false king has failed :
A plan which I opposed from the beginning.
And nothing now remains save speedily
To rid us of this madman.

VIOLETTA.

He seems to me
To have the quality of noble kings.

DEMOPHILUS.

You heard about the Council ? Mad, quite mad.

VIOLETTA.

I cannot think so.

DEMOPHILUS.

Be it as it may,
Most swiftly he must go.

VIOLETTA.

He shall not go.

DEMOPHILUS.

Who shall prevent it ?

VIOLETTA.

I.

DEMOPHILUS.

(Walking up to her and fixing his eyes on her.)

Violetta !

VIOLETTA.

I.

DEMOPHILUS.

Then it is true ?

(VIOLETTA does not answer. Pause.)

DEMOPHILUS.

You love this mountebank ?

VIOLETTA.

Yes, it is true.

DEMOPHILUS.

This mummer and this tramp !

VIOLETTA.

Firstly, I do not think him basely born,
And were he so, his inborn nobleness
Is greater than is known to this, our Court ;
He puts you all to shame. And secondly,
Be he an upstart, mad or what you please—
I love him—

DEMOPHILUS.

Will you countenance his plans ?
His dreams of fairyland, his childish laws ?

VIOLETTA.

Yes, I will help him ; we shall rule together
Against you all. We shall prevail.

DEMOPHILUS.

Indeed !

Perhaps you dream of marriage and the throne
As Queen. You think the people will accept you ;
You, whose long list of lovers furnishes
Substance for ribald ballads. You, whose name,
A bye-word—

VIOLETTA.

It is marvellous to me
That you once stooped to love me, noble Count.
I have no dreams of Queendom ; I will be
His mistress.

DEMOPHILUS.

And I tell you this is madness ;
You think he loves you. This is pitiful !
You have been duped and cheated by a child.
He loves another, a common courtesan—
Thais—

VIOLETTA.

I know he loved her in the past,
But that is over. Have you further news ?

DEMOPHILUS.

It is not over, for he sees her daily ;
Our spies detected this. You doubt my word ?
Well, give me a few moments, you shall see ;
The tavern where they meet, she and her fellows,
Is but a stone's throw from the palace gate ;
I'll bring her hither ; you shall see yourself
That he belongs to her.

VIOLETTA.

I am content.
Go, fetch her. I accept the challenge.

DEMOPHILUS.

Most swiftly will she seize her ancient prey ;
You do not know this woman.

Ah !

VIOLETTA.

Let her come—
Alone. I have no need of words with you.

DEMOPHILUS.

Violetta, this is all a hideous jest ;
These words mean nothing. Now the storm is
over,
The farce is finished. Let this foolishness
Be quite forgotten, and our senseless quarrel
Wiped out.

(VIOLETTA looks at him in silence.)

DEMOPHILUS.

Violetta—

VIOLETTA.

Go.

DEMOPHILUS.

Violetta—

VIOLETTA.

Go.

DEMOPHILUS.

My hasty words were born of jealous love.
Forgive me.

*(VIOLETTA remains silent and does not look
at him.)*

Ah ! Violetta, mercy, mercy !

(VIOLETTA turns her back on him.)

DEMOPHILUS.

Since you will have it.

*(Exit DEMOPHILUS by door opening on
passage L.)*

VIOLETTA.

Desiderio !

(Enter DESIDERIO L. from his room.)

VIOLETTA.

Listen to me. They seek your doom.

DESIDERIO.

Who seeks it ?

VIOLETTA.

Demophilus, Nelides and the rest ;
But I will thwart them. Desiderio,
Will you accept my help ? Will you that I
Should stand with you against this plotting band ?
And, if the need should be, against the world ?
To labour for the people, for the country ?
Speak, will you trust me ?

DESIDERIO.

As I trust the sun

To rise at morn.

VIOLETTA.

Our task is perilous,

Most perilous ; yet united we are strong,
For you are the anointed king, and they
Dare not unmask the monarch whom they chose.
But they may seek to slay you ; we must find
Support among the people ; they must rise
And hound our enemies to their doom ; and you
And I, O Desiderio, at their heads
Shall rule the land. I love you, O my child,
My king. I love you for your starry soul
And for your noble ways. An upstart you !

You are more kingly than all emperors ;
Authority hangs from you like a robe,
And in your eyes, your manly, childlike eyes,
The inviolate sacredness of monarchs shines.
What matter all their plots, their stratagems,
I love you ? I shall guard you O my king,
As the wild tigress guards her darling young.
Ah ! we together shall give peace to men,
Wisdom and kindness and felicity ;
Plenty will flow from us and prosperous days,
And liberty shall dawn on the dark land.
Will you accept my help, my love, my strength,
The sacrifice of what is best in me ?
For, though my life has hitherto been evil,
You have redeemed me, dragged me from the mire ;
You have brought comfort to my desperate soul.
I owe my life, my new-born life, to you,
Only to you.

DESIDERIO.

Yes, let us work together ;
I do not merit all this vehement praise.
I am but a poor wanderer. Ah ! Violetta,
This is too much, much more than I deserve.
Yet let us work.

VIOLETTA.

(Looking out of the window.) Now leave me for a
moment,

Demophilus comes, and I must speak with him.

(Exit DESIDERIO L. to his room.)

They come. And now to finish with the woman.

(Enter CAMILLA L. from the passage.)

CAMILLA.

Your Highness,

A woman waits without. She would come in.
She craves an audience.

VIOLETTA.

Who and what is she ?

CAMILLA.

Her name I know not, for she would not tell.
She says that she must see you.

VIOLETTA.

Let her come.

(Enter CAMILLA and THAIS L. from the passage. THAIS is richly dressed, but wears a dark cloak which she throws off when she comes in. She walks up to VIOLETTA and stands in front of her. Exit CAMILLA R.)

THAIS.

My name is Thais.

(VIOLETTA looks inquiringly at THAIS.)

Yes ; the same, you know.

He told you.

VIOLETTA.

Yes, he told me. What do you wish ?

THAIS.

I come for Desiderio. Give him back.

VIOLETTA.

What is this madness ?

THAIS.

You ~~now~~ know better than I.
You know he is a child—a guileless fool,
They say ; yet not a fool ; but you and yours
Have taken him to use him for your ends.
You made a dummy king, and now you find
The dummy breathes and thinks and mars your
plans,
And so you wish to do away with him.
False kings are not deposed. There is no need :
They disappear. But I have come to warn him.
The people love him. He shall yet be saved.

VIOLETTA.

This is wild folly. No one seeks to harm him.
They have misled you. Desiderio is king :
The nobles recognise his rule.

THAIS.

His rule !

Ah ! if he rules, where will the nobles be ?

VIOLETTA.

'Tis well ; I see you heed me not ; 'tis vain
That we should bandy bitter words. Farewell.

THAIS.

Tell Desiderio I am here.

VIOLETTA.

He knows it.

THAIS.

Now I see clearly, Duchess, that is false—
A lie—for Desiderio knows it not.

VIOLETTA.

I will not listen. Wherefore are you here ?

THAIS.

To save him.

VIOLETTA.

You know well he needs no saving.
This is the truth : you came because you loved him,
Because you are devoured by jealousy :
Because you know he loves me.

THAIS.

False, false woman ;
Look in my heart ; God help me if I lie.
'Tis true I love him and I pity him,
And never have I seen a nobler man—
Simple and guileless ; but for jealousy,
It is far from my thoughts ; you could not love him,
He is too simple, you too proud and skillful ;
You can deceive him, and although he saw
The depths of your deceit he would forgive ;
For he takes pity on such souls as yours.
But as for me, I have no need of wiles.
He knows the inmost corners of my heart ;
He looks at me and reads my silent eyes ;
For you he weaves a veil of adoration,
He builds an altar of bright sacrifice
And worships the tall pillar of flame ; for you
He joyfully would throw away his life ;
But he can never love you, for his heart
Is parted from your heart ; there is no way
By which he can attain your heart ; it dwells
In its hard shell of metal, cold, aloof,

Buried in an impenetrable mine,
A diamond bright and flashing. But with me
All is made different by a little thing—
I love him. If your heart could melt or move
Or feel one little pang, he would be yours.
I love him. How could he resist my love
Which wrapped him round like darkness or like
warmth ?

And he resisted not. When he and I
Speak with each other, the whole world dissolves
And time stands still and motionless and fixed.
We taste the bliss of the eternal dead.
Then how could I be jealous envying you ?
Oh ! let us put aside such talk. Yet listen :
His life is threatened, for the nobles here
Are watched and followed by our spies. We know
Nelides has sealed his doom. He'll die
Or disappear ; your vanity and pride
Cannot demand this cruel sacrifice.
Let him return to us.

*(Enter DESIDERIO L. He remains trans-
fixed with astonishment in the centre of
the room behind them. They do not
notice him.)*

VIOLETTA.

These lofty words
Hide not the truth that you are mad with envy.
You know not what a pitiful part you play.
Know then that Desiderio shall be safe.
I love him, and I will protect him well.
And if you loved him, wherefore did you leave him ?
Why do you plan to wed Cesario,

The rich and dissolute merchant ? I will tell you :
To rise out of the ranks of infamy.

THAIS.

I left him, it is true ; he is too good.
It was because I loved him that I left him—
But not to rise into the infamous ranks
Of women such as you, the same in kind
As we : I do not envy the degree.

VIOLETTA.

How dare you speak to me and rail at me ?
You who have lived, a parasite and vampire,
Upon the rotting flesh of ruined men ?

THAIS.

What do you know of me that you thus judge me ?

VIOLETTA.

I know your love is daily bought and sold.

THAIS.

Cease !

DESIDERIO.

(*Coming forward.*) Hush ! Violetta.

VIOLETTA.

Look upon this woman ;
She comes to find me here, her pretext this :
That I desire your death ; but the true cause
Is jealousy and envy mixed with fear.

THAIS.

She lies. Heed, Desiderio ; I have come,
Not for my sake, but for the people's sake.

Think you that in this house of lies and plots
They'll let you work for the people? Never,
never.

Why did they bring you here and make you king?
They sought a shield to hide their hateful schemes.
Demophilus has told me. She (*pointing to VIO-*
• LETTA) is with them, too;

And, seeing that you disconcert their plot,
They now have planned to do away with you.
Think not of me; banish me from your mind,
But come back to the people, for they need you;
They are your brothers and your kith and kin—
The kindred of your soul. Come back to them.

VIOLETTA.

Your eloquence is wasted; he has told me
His love for you shrinks shuddering, turned to
hate;—

That he could pity you, but never love you.

THAIS.

Perhaps I am not even worth his pity;
And yet you lie; he hates me not, nor told you;
He could not say that. (*she bursts into tears.*)
(VIOLETTA *smiles triumphantly.* THAIS
looks at VIOLETTA, calmly smiling, and
a spark of rage leaps into her eyes.)

Yet, despite your lies,
He shall abandon you and follow me,
And you shall vanish from his mind like music
Once heard with joy, forgotten then for ever.
He'll stay with me for ever till we die,
For he is mine; if he comes not to me,

If he responds not instantly to my love,
Take him ; I shall not need him any more.
(*To DESIDERIO.*) You told me you would follow
me for ever,
That you forgave me ; and, whatsoe'er should be,
That we should go together through the world
And labour for the people—you did not lie ;
Speak, Desiderio, say you did not lie,
For I believed in you.
(*She bursts into tears.*)

DESIDERIO.

(*Walks up to her and looks with pity on her.*)
Alas ! Poor child !

VIOLETTA.

Take him, for he is yours ;

DESIDERIO.

(*To VIOLETTA.*) Violetta !

VIOLETTA.

Exit

And let me never set eyes upon you

THAIS.

(*To DESIDERIO.*) Come.

(*DESIDERIO follows THAIS, looking sadly
back at VIOLETTA. Exeunt THAIS and
DESIDERIO L.*)

VIOLETTA.

(*Calling.*)

Camilla !

(*Enter CAMILLA R.*)

Go to the Lord Nelides,

And tell him I must speak with him.

(CAMILLA goes out R. VIOLETTA walks up and down the room in agitation. Suddenly a great shout is heard outside. The people cry out.)

VIOLETTA.

(Going to the window.) Already! Woman, you shall rue this day!

Maybe we shall be all of us overthrown,
Dragged down in one destruction.

(Enter NELIDES R.)

Ah! my Lord,

You are welcome. This is all I have to say:

Heard you the people's shout?

NELIDES.

I hear it now.

What is it?

VIOLETTA.

They acclaim King Lysias.

NELIDES.

Well?

VIOLETTA.

You were right.

NELIDES.

What? Desiderio?

You understand now. He must be removed.

VIOLETTA.

Remove him soon, or it will be too late.

(A renewed shouting is heard from the crowd.)

ACT III.

SCENE I. A ROOM IN THAIS' HOUSE.

*(Doors R. leading into another room and
L. C. opening on a staircase. R. C. a
window opening on the street. THAIS
and DESIDERIO are discovered.)*

THAIS.

We must act quickly.

DESIDERIO.

What is to be done ?

The people are all for us.

THAIS.

Yes, for freedom,

But many are against the name of king.

DESIDERIO.

What shall we do ?

THAIS.

Wait for the great uprising.

DESIDERIO.

Until the rising we must stay concealed,
Lest they should capture us.

THAIS.

I fear their minions

Are on your track.

DESIDERIO.

Yes.

THAIS.

There is but one course,
One hope of safety ; it is in the people ;
But you, until they rise, must not be found.

DESIDERIO.

You say they need no king.

THAIS.

They need a leader ;
Into their hands you must entrust your life.
There is no other way. And we must march
Against the court and utterly destroy
The nest of nobles.

DESIDERIO.

I will shed no blood.

THAIS.

What ? do you hanker after that false court ?
The Duchess ?

DESIDERIO.

Peace. No bloodshed.

(A knock is heard.)

THAIS.

Go one moment
Into my room ; a leader of the people
Has come ; he is of us, an enemy
Of kings ; and I must bring him round to reason.
(Exit DESIDERIO R.)

It is Cesario.

(She goes to the door and unlocks it. Enter CESARIO.)

What has taken place ?

CESARIO.

Where is the king ?

THAIS.

Why do you seek the king ?

CESARIO.

I know that he is here.

THAIS.

What then ? 'Tis true.

CESARIO.

All is prepared, and ready for the rising ;
The leaders in all parts of the town are gathered
And armed ; I have but now to give the signal.
As for the king, well, let the nobles hang him.
Where is he hidden ?

THAIS.

Never.

CESARIO.

What is this ?

THAIS.

Never, I said ! You know that he is for us,
And one of us : the people's friend of friends.
They love him ; he shall lead us.

CESARIO.

What is this ?

And who has put this folly in your head ?

We need no king. The people is the sovereign
About to be enthroned. As for this man—
This Lysias, this creature of the court,
This princeling—there is no more need of him ;
Their time is done for ever.

THAIS.

He is ours ;
I promise you, I swear to you 'tis true.
A noble man ; he is the people's child,
The people's champion ; they acknowledge him.
Did you not hear their cry when they acclaimed
him ?
The crowd surrounded us ; but we fled hither
For safety from the soldiers of the court.

CESARIO.

But I and all my following need no king.
My following is the strongest ; those who cheered
Were but the rabble. He must die.

THAIS.

No, never.

Listen.

CESARIO.

I will not listen. Kings are doomed,
And this one more than others.

THAIS.

Why, oh, why ?

CESARIO.

(Walking up to her and whispering.) Because you
love him.

THAIS.

Mercy ! it is true !

Think not of this ; this is no time for love.

CESARIO.

Am I a simpleton ? You seem to think so.
I for some time had harboured my suspicion ;
You shall not play the traitor, nor betray
The cause nor me. What care I for this king ?
If he is one of us a thousand times,
He still shall die. Through him I am supplanted.
You cannot love the cause and love the king.
But be that as it may, I have condemned him
Because I hate him. And his doom is near.
The Senators have sent their men to take him ;
I told them of his hiding place ; they come
Now, and they will not tarry, they will hang him.

THAIS.

Yes, they will hang us.

CESARIO.

What ?

THAIS.

They will hang us both.

I die with him.

CESARIO.

Thais !

THAIS.

You simpleton,

I love him ; do you think I'll smile on you,
His murderer ? Miserable man ! Ah ! leave me !

CESARIO.

Have you forgotten all the past—your life ?
The cause, our work, the labour of long years ?
Your vows, your promises ?

THAIS.

Yes, everything :
The past is blotted out ; you have betrayed
The noblest of our brothers.

CESARIO.

Thais, come.
They will be here. Come, Thais, flee with me ;
Flee ! You shall come whether you will or no.
*(Takes hold of her wrist : she struggles and
frees herself.)*

THAIS.

Ah ! Desiderio, help !

*(Enter DESIDERIO R. He rushes forward,
takes THAIS in his arms and draws his
sword.)*

(To CESARIO.) Ah ! when they come,—
I shall accuse myself, the only cause
Of all this trouble. Ah ! the Duchess hates me,
Sure is my doom !

CESARIO.

Forgive me ; come, come, flee—

THAIS.

It is too late.

CESARIO.

But I will save you both ;
Come, fly.

THAIS.

(To DESIDERIO.) He has denounced us to Demophilus.

CESARIO.

(To DESIDERIO.) Come.

DESIDERIO.

Whither ?

THAIS.

I will not go.

CESARIO.

(To DESIDERIO.) Then bid her fly,
For they will kill her ; sacrifice yourself.

THAIS.

I will not go.

DESIDERIO.

We shall remain together.

CESARIO.

(To DESIDERIO.) Ah ! curse you. I will kill you !
(A loud rapping is heard at the door.)

I will save you !

(CESARIO unlocks the door L.)

(To the soldiers who enter.) Here is the king !
Now for the signal !

(CESARIO goes out of the door L., and a loud
whistle is heard.)

FIRST SOLDIER.

Found !

Come, we must bind you.

(They bind THAIS' and DESIDERIO's
hands ; they make no resistance.)

THAIS.

What is our fate ?

FIRST SOLDIER.

The gallows.

THAIS.

When ?

FIRST SOLDIER.

At once.

*(A noise of shouting is heard in the distance.
Bells ring.)*

THAIS.

It is the people ! Ah ! I understand.

He gave the signal ! He will save us ! Ah !

They come, they come, the people, the great rising !

They come to set us free !

(The noise of the crowd is heard louder.)

FIRST SOLDIER.

And we are lost !

THAIS.

No ; loose our hands. I'll save you.

(The soldiers release THAIS and DESIDERIO.

THAIS leads them to her room.)

Quick ! hide here.

(To DESIDERIO.) Now we must head the crowd
and seek the palace,

And utterly destroy that nest of vipers,

That den of wolves ; their doom has come at last.

Nelides and Demophilus and the rest

Shall perish ; and the Duchess, she who dared

To say you loved her.

DESIDERIO.

Thais, it was true.

I loved her, and I love her now.

THAIS.

The Duchess !

That infamous woman, first in all the court
To hatch the deeds of tyranny, to squander ;
The very soul and spirit of the court.
Ah ! you are mad !

DESIDERIO.

'Tis true I love Violetta
As I love you. And boundless is my love—
I love all men.

THAIS.

Ah ! these are crazy words ;
You know not what you say, she has bewitched you,
Deceived you, mocked you. Ah ! the hateful
woman ;
You know not what she is ! You little know
Her vileness—

DESIDERIO.

If she dies I will not live ;
I will surrender to my enemies ;
For life to me is needless if she dies.
I said no bloodshed ; and Violetta's life—
(The crowd is heard in the street very loud.)

THAIS.

You cannot understand ! Fool that I am !
Forgive me, Desiderio. Ah ! forget
My angry words. Forgive me and forget ;
I am a wretched woman, wicked, vile ;

And you are noble ; nor can understand
The vileness and the meanness that are in me.
Forgive me and forget. These things are small ;
But we are bound unto a mighty cause.
Come, you shall lead us. Hark to the people's
tread !

An army unnumber'd ; they are on the stairs.
Come, you shall lead them.

*(The crowd bursts into the room through the
door L.)*

THE CROWD.

The soldiers !

THAIS.

They have fled, and we are free !
Come, follow us unto the palace square.

*(The crowd carry DESIDERIO and THAIS
away with them shouting.)*

SCENE II.—THE PALACE SQUARE.

*(On the right is a flight of steps leading up
to the Palace. In the centre are various
buildings. On the left is a broad flight of
steps leading up to the Temple of Jupiter.
Enter NELIDES and CAMILLO).*

CAMILLO.

Where is he now ?

NELIDES.

The men have not returned
I sent to take him.

(Cries of the people are heard in the distance)

CAMILLO.

Hark ! The people come ;
Send for the guard !

NELIDES.

The guard has fled in terror.

CAMILLO.

Send for the soldiery without.

NELIDES.

'Tis done ;
But done perhaps too late.

CAMILLO.

What shall we do ?

NELIDES.

Wait. There is nothing left for us to do.
The crowd must vent its utmost fury, then—
Order shall be restored by soldiery.
Come to the palace.

CAMILLO.

They can force the doors.

NELIDES.

We can defend ourselves ; I have no fear.

(The crowd is heard louder and louder.

*NELIDES and CAMILLO walk up the steps
into the palace.*

*The crowd advances, bearing DESIDERIO
and THAIS along with it. DESIDERIO
and THAIS walk to the steps of the Temple,
L. The crowd shout.)*

THAIS.

Be silent.

THE CROWD.

Peace ! Peace ! Speak ! The King !

THAIS.

My friends.

A CITIZEN.

Silence ! The King !

SECOND CITIZEN.

The King ! We will be silent.

THAIS.

Listen, my friends. 'Twas not from love of you
The gang of nobles murdered the late king,
And set up this King Lysias in his stead ;
But so as to achieve their private ends,
So as to rule themselves ; but now they know
This king is with you, and his will your will,
They wish to do away with him : to kill him.

THE CROWD.

Down with the tyrants !

THAIS.

Listen.

THE CROWD.

Long live the king !

THAIS.

And he will speak.

CITIZEN.

Silence ! The king will speak.

DESIDERIO.

Brothers—

A VOICE.

Long live the king !

THE CROWD.

Long live the king !

DESIDERIO.

Brothers, through no designing and no plot,
Nor by ambition's crooked and perilous path,
Have I attained unto this lofty seat.
I was your brother. I am now your king ;
But I am still your brother.

(The crowd shout.)

When they crowned me,
I swore to do my duty by my people.
Not threats, nor frowns, nor force, nor might of men
Shall keep me from fulfilling this my oath.

CITIZEN.

The king has sworn.

c.

SECOND CITIZEN.

The king shall keep his oath.
(Renewed shouting.)

DESIDERIO.

Believe but in me ; strengthened by your trust,
Nothing can hurt me. They shall plot in vain.
For, looking down from my throne, what do I see ?
Famine where should be plenty ; starving peasants,
The tillers of the soil, the sons of earth,

Bowed down with misery, with labour crushed ;
And why ? Because their substance goes in taxes.
That noblemen may squander.

A VOICE.

Down with them !

DESIDERIO.

Nothing the people have they can call their own,
Not even the dark hovels where they sleep,
Nor yet the fields and vineyards which they till ;
Nor yet the children of their flesh, nor yet
The thoughts that in them dwell ; and if they speak
Or murmur, they are hanged, and for their toil
The wage is paid with the lash. Their sons are
taken

To serve as soldiers or to live as slaves ;
Their daughters are the playthings of the rich,
Set aside as a state monopoly,
As special chattels for the riotous court.

A VOICE.

Vengeance !

DESIDERIO.

More hapless than the roving beasts,
Down-trodden, trampled, branded, crushed and
ground,
They well may curse the day they saw the light.
The teacher and the sage must hold their peace,
The priest is hounded from the broken shrine,
The artisan and the artist dare not work,
The poet dares not speak his glorious dream ;
The minstrel quells his soaring fount of song,
The sage conceals the treasures of his mind ;

For those who dare to think or speak their minds
The fate is prison, banishment, or worse :
They are enrolled among the soldiery.

A CITIZEN

Slaves !

ANOTHER.

Mercenaries !

DESIDERIO.

God have pity on these !
Their bread is blows and words like cuts of the lash,
And unremitting tyranny. They are sent
To distant lands to fight they know not why,
Nor yet for whom ; but not for any cause,
Not for their country's sake or for their king,
But for the folly of his councillors,
For lying cheats who gamble with the crown.
Like flocks of sheep they are sent to alien lands
To toil, to fight, to suffer and to die.

(The crowd shout.)

And none may speak and say these things are
wrong,

Abominable and accursed of God !

The people are gagged, their spokesmen dangle high
Upon the gallows, and their bleached bones

Warn others to keep silence ; but there comes

A wind from Heaven nothing can resist,

A time when the deep cup of misery

Is full : when God makes out of man a clarion

To speak his will. I am the instrument,

The voice, the breath, the music at whose sound

The strongholds and the fortresses of evil

Fall crashing to the earth. You hear my voice ;

No one shall stop me now, nor drown my words.
And if I fall in the end, and if I fail,
And if they crush me with their swords and chains,
Not unavailing is the sacrifice,
Not vainly shall my martyred body serve
As stepping stone to others who shall follow ;
For I shall have done a thing which by no power
Can be undone again. In your dark dungeon
I open the barred window, I let in
The light of liberty, the morning sky,
The glory of the dawn ; no force on earth
Can ever shut the window or drive back
The sunlight that has flooded the dark cell.
Through me the bars are shattered, and you taste
The breath and wind of freedom, dawn and spring ;
And I have given you God's open air.
Speak : will you have your brother for a king ?
Your leader while he lives, his heart, his spirit
Your voice, the trumpet pealing forth your will ?
And if he falls, speak, will you take his body
To be your stepping stone to freedom ? Speak !

• VOICES OF THE PEOPLE.

Long live the king ! Long live our brother the
king !

Down with the tyrants ; down with tyranny ;
Down with Demophilus ; down with the harlot
Duchess ;

Down with the nobles !

(The uproar continues for a few moments.)

A VOICE IN THE CROWD.

To the palace ; come !
Revenge ! Revenge ! Death to the Senators !

VOICES OF THE PEOPLE.

Death to the Duchess !

DESIDERIO.

Brothers, listen ; peace !
I come to bring you peace, in the name of peace.
Revenge is not for us. Since they were cruel,
We must be just. Since they were hard and brutal,
We must be mild. For it is love I bring.
My soul shall be the clarion that proclaims
Freedom and peace and love ; the radiant joy
Of universal brotherhood—

VOICES IN THE CROWD.

Revenge !

DESIDERIO.

Ah ! brothers, listen. If my words were fiery,
It was because I spoke of the dark past ;
But now the bars are broken, the dreadful days
Are done—

THE CROWD.

Revenge ! Away with them ! Away !

DESIDERIO.

Above the threatening mountains of the past
The sun has risen in new majesty ;
The sky re-echoes with triumphant song,
Welcoming the new age— ,

THE CROWD.

Revenge ! revenge !
Vengeance is ours. Death to the Senators !

A MAN IN THE CROWD.

Down with the tyrants !

THE CROWD.

To the Palace : come !

The Palace ! Death !

DESIDERIO.

My brothers, hear me, brothers !

(His voice is drowned by the shouting. The crowd moves like a sea towards the Palace.)

DESIDERIO.

Brothers—

THAIS.

It is too late, you have let loose

The chained up passion of long centuries.

(The people move towards the Palace and crowd up the steps.)

A VOICE.

Demophilus : the worst !

ANOTHER.

Nelides ! Death !

THE CROWD.

Demophilus ! Nelides ! Death !

THAIS.

The Duchess !

She is the worst of all.

THE CROWD.

The Duchess ! Death !

THAIS.

She is the fiend that prompted them to slaughter.

The Duchess ! down with her ! Down ! Revenge
and death !

*(The doors of the Palace are flung open, and
VIOLETTA appears.)*

VIOLETTA.

What is this turmoil, Sirs ! I fear you not,
Poor blinded people by a madman led !
Think you I fear this noise, these menaces ?
Go !

*(The hubbub of the crowd dies down. Some
of them draw back shamefacedly. Others
remain hesitating. DESIDERIO and THAIS
makes their way through the crowd and
walk up the steps of the Palace.)*

VIOLETTA.

Cowards, I am quite defenceless, see,
A woman ; and the guard has abandoned me.
I fear you not. I know you all too well,
False rabble, fickle, senseless, cowardly rabble,
Led by a madman and a harlot. See *(pointing to
Thais)*

This woman, this low courtesan, inspires you !
She is your goddess : make her queen, for she
Already is your common spouse—

*(The crowd burst into a cry of ungovernable
fury.)*

DESIDERIO.

(To VIOLETTA.)

Be silent !

VIOLETTA.

No, I shall speak ; I scorn you and despise you ;
I spit upon you, little, slavish men,
Dogs ! chicken-livered mongrels ! cowards, curs—
Lackeys, not men.

THE CROWD.

Revenge ! Revenge ! Revenge !
(The crowd swarm up the steps of the Palace shouting with rage. DESIDERIO forces VIOLETTA back into the Palace, and shuts the doors and stands in front of them.)

DESIDERIO.

Cease ! You must hear me first.

THE CROWD.

Revenge ! Revenge !
 Down with the Duchess !

THAIS.

(To DESIDERIO.) It is all in vain ;
 They thirst for blood, and nothing now can stop
 them.

DESIDERIO.

Cease ! Hear me you shall.
(The crowd wavers.)

A VOICE IN THE CROWD.

• We'll hear ; but she is doomed.
 They showed no mercy. They must die.

CROWD.

(Shouting.) Revenge !

DESIDERIO.

First hear me ; only hear me. There'll be time
 To glut your rage when I have spoken.

A VOICE.

Speak !

ANOTHER.

Speak ! Let us hear him.

ANOTHER.

Silence !

VOICES OF THE CROWD.

Silence ! Speak !

DESIDERIO.

Brothers, I am the cause of all this trouble,
For I have led you to the dizzy brink
Of this abyss. Hear ! I am not the king ;
I am not the lost Lysias, nor am I bound
By any link unto the royal race.
I am a beggar born, named Desiderio ;
An upstart, an impostor, a false king ;
The nobles chose me for my beardless face,
For my strange likeness to the murdered man.
I was but in their fingers a weak tool—
Their minion and their instrument.

A VOICE.

'Tis false !

DESIDERIO.

Ask Thais, she knows whence I came—and how,
And who and what I am.

THAIS.

(*To DESIDERIO.*) It is for her
You sacrifice your soul ! (*DESIDERIO nods.*)

(*To the crowd.*) Yes, it is true,
All true. He is not the king, but an impostor ;
I saw him come in rags into the town.
Yet when they made him king I trusted him,
Believed in him and hoped ; the truth is plain,
The truth is bitter : he cares not for the people ;
His heart is in the palace.

A VOICE.

Down with him !

THE CROWD.

Down with the upstart ! Death to the impostor !
*(The crowd surge round him and bear him
 from the steps of the Palace.)*

DESIDERIO.

(Cries out to THAIS.) Thais, since you have wished
 it, it is well.
*(The crowd bear him off in ever-rising ex-
 citement.)*

THE CROWD.

Down with him !

A VOICE.

To the gallows !

THE CROWD.

Hang him ! Hang him !
*(The crowd bear him away shouting. Enter
 VIOLETTA from the Palace door.)*

VIOLETTA.

Where is he ?

THAIS.

They have taken him away.
 To save you he declared himself an upstart,
 A false impostor ; he let them wreak the rage,
 That else had fallen on you, upon himself.

VIOLETTA.

And you looked on ?

THAIS.

I told them it was true.

VIOLETTA.

You killed him, then.

THAIS.

I killed him.

VIOLETTA.

And he died
For me. He loved me more than he loved you.

THAIS.

He loved not with the love of man, his love
Was like the sea that washes the whole world ;
We were the seed-weed sprinkled with its foam.
But he is mine. I love him more than you—
So greatly that I killed him.

*(The exultant cry of the crowd is heard in
the distance.)*

He is dead.

(A noise of drums is heard.)

VIOLETTA.

Ha ! Now the soldiers come ! The king is dead !
And liberty is dead, and by your hand !

(A noise of drums is heard.)

(Enter SOLDIERS.)

VIOLETTA.

Arrest that woman. Let her be hanged to-day.

*(An exultant expression comes over THAIS'
face.)*

VIOLETTA.

No, let her go.

(To THAIS.) Go back to the dark prison

Which is your daily life, and take my curse.

(Enter DEMOPHILUS and NELIDES.)

DEMOPHILUS.

(To the SOLDIERS.) Disperse the crowd. Let
order be restored.



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